

**Testimony of Karen Foley-Schain, M.A., M.Ed, LPC
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Good morning. My name is Karen Foley-Schain and I am the Executive Director of the State of Connecticut's Children's Trust Fund.

I am pleased to be here to testify in support of two bills:

- Raised S.B. 749 - An Act Concerning the Inclusion of the Children's Trust Fund in the Early Childhood Education Cabinet.
- Proposed H.B. 5145 - An Act Concerning Education of Students on the Prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome - with one minor revision.

I would like to tell you just a bit about the Children's Trust Fund and why we think these proposals make good sense for the State of Connecticut.

The Children's Trust Fund is a state agency in the executive branch of government. We are charged with preventing child abuse and neglect and providing resources for families in order to ensure the positive growth and development of Connecticut's children.

This mission has led us to finding the most effective means of assisting and strengthening families so that they can meet the demands of parenting and develop nurturing relationships with their children.

Through this work the Trust Fund is helping thousands of parents make certain that their children will be healthy, developmentally on track, and able to meet their full potential.

Early Childhood Cabinet

In reviewing the work of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet we found that the Cabinet shares our goal. As a result we support the Trust Fund's inclusion on the Cabinet.

Membership on the Cabinet would allow the Trust Fund to gain valuable information and insight from its work -- as well as make a significant contribution to its efforts. Membership would also enable us to better coordinate our efforts, maximize our resources and avoid duplication.

Shaken Baby Syndrome

It takes less than three seconds of shaking to kill or disable a child for life.

Shaken baby syndrome is caused by a violent whip lash-type motion of the head that causes the brain to rotate within the skull cavity, injuring or destroying brain tissue. At least 1,200 to 1,400 children in the United States are injured or killed by shaking every year. There are more than 12 diagnosed cases of shaken baby syndrome in Connecticut each year -- and the actual number of cases is probably even higher.

About 25 percent of shaken babies die as a result of their injuries. Of the children who survive, 80 percent suffer permanent disabilities such as severe brain damage, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, behavioral disorders and impaired motor and cognitive skills. 85 percent of children who die or are permanently disabled by being shaken are between the ages of birth and 1.

Recent research has linked prolonged crying -- especially in the early months of life -- with shaken baby syndrome. Episodes of crying can last for a couple of hours -- and even longer for some babies.

New studies show that it isn't enough to simply tell parents not to shake their baby -- the information must get beyond the parents and to the baby-sitters who are responsible for up to 20% of the incidence of shaken baby syndrome.

This is especially important for young people to know. Middle school and high school students have little experience with infants and crying and yet up to 60% of them have baby sitting responsibilities for small children.

It takes just one brief moment to shake a baby -- one brief moment for a young person to make a tragic mistake.

Recent research has found that educating care givers about the dangers of shaking a baby and how to cope with crying reduces the incidence of shaking baby syndrome by about half.

In light of this the Children's Trust Fund has brought a shaking baby prevention program to several hundred middle-school and high school students.

The program has been well received by the students and teachers alike. And while we are glad to provide this training - this bill offers the state an opportunity to integrate this message into the school's ongoing curriculum and ensure that all young people hear it.

This can be achieved a little or no cost to the state. The Trust Fund would be pleased to share the information and training materials we have developed with the schools and help them in any way we can. We would recommend that the bill be revised to allow each school to determine how to offer the prevention program. The program can be successfully given outside of the health curriculum by the classroom teacher, school nurse or social worker, at an all school assembly or in other ways.

In addition to the middle and high school program the Trust Fund has launched several other initiatives to get the word out about Shaken Baby Syndrome. They include:

- A program in several Connecticut hospitals to let all parents know about the importance of never shaking a baby.
- Bringing the message about the dangers of shaking a baby to the 1,200 at-risk families visited regularly at home by our Nurturing Families Network staff each year.
- Training more than 1,000 human services providers in strategies to prevent shaken baby syndrome.
- A Take 5 public awareness campaign and web site www.takefiveparenting.com

Our latest effort includes a forum on this topic. The forum will feature an incredible panel of experts and parents who have lost a child to shaken baby syndrome. The forum will be held at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford on April 16, from 5:30- 7:30.

Invitations with more detail about the event are attached to my testimony. I hope that you will join us for an important conversation about addressing this major problem.

Thank you.